

**Testimony of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC)
In Support of LDs 453, 1017, and 1029
In Opposition to LDs 1046 and 1066
Public Hearing: April 7, 2025 10 AM**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy, Communications, and Policy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC represents more than 100 organizations across Maine—including grassroots immigrant-led groups, legal service providers, housing advocates, and direct service agencies—working collectively to improve the economic and social standing of Maine's immigrant communities.

Today, I write and submit this testimony on behalf of our coalition members in **support of LDs 453, 1017, and 1029**, and in **opposition to LDs 1046 and 1066**.

SUPPORT – LD 453, LD 1017, LD 1029

We strongly support **LD 453**, which increases the state's reimbursement rate for General Assistance from 70% to 90%. Municipalities and tribal governments are doing vital work to meet urgent community needs—especially as the current General Assistance framework was not built to meet the level of demand we are now seeing on the ground. That demand has grown due to a combination of housing shortages, rising costs of living, and increased needs across our communities. Increasing the reimbursement rate strengthens our shared statewide safety net, eases pressure on local budgets, and ensures that no community is left bearing these costs alone.

We also support **LD 1017**, which clarifies that food served in emergency shelters is an eligible General Assistance expense. This is a critical clarification. No one should be punished for feeding people in crisis. Emergency shelters serve as a front line of support in Maine's homelessness response system, and this bill affirms their essential role by ensuring municipalities are reimbursed appropriately for basic food provision.

Finally, we support **LD 1029**, which expands presumptive eligibility and ensures that people receiving GA housing support can still access help for other necessities like food or medication. These changes acknowledge that people often need multiple forms of support at once, especially in moments of crisis. By streamlining access and protecting comprehensive support, this bill ensures GA is responsive, humane, and effective.

OPPOSE – LD 1046 and LD 1066

We strongly oppose **LD 1046**, which would impose a 180-day state residency requirement before someone could access General Assistance. This bill would deny help to people who are lawfully in the state but unable to prove long-term residency—something that is especially hard for people who are unhoused, fleeing violence, newly arrived, or simply unaware they might need to keep such documentation. Rather than preventing misuse, this bill would withhold support from people in legitimate crisis, creating greater vulnerability and long-term harm.

We also oppose **LD 1066**, which would impose arbitrary time limits on General Assistance for housing—limiting support to just 30 days or three months within a twelve-month period. Housing instability doesn't follow a calendar. There are already far too few shelter beds and housing options across Maine, and these time caps would push more people into unsafe or unsheltered situations when no alternatives are available. That's a step backward for public health, housing security, and our communities.

General Assistance Is a Shared Responsibility and a Smart Investment

For asylum seekers who are unable to work due to federal waiting periods, for single parents escaping domestic violence, for older adults, and for people with chronic health conditions—General Assistance is often the last remaining support keeping them from total destitution. And for local governments, it's a vital tool to prevent crisis, reduce long-term costs, and maintain public stability.

This safety net doesn't serve just immigrants—it serves all Mainers. It helps people in emergency situations. It creates pathways to stability. It upholds our shared values of dignity, fairness, and care. The bills we support today reflect those values. The ones we oppose would erode them.

We respectfully urge you to vote **“Ought to Pass” on LDs 453, 1017, and 1029**, and **“Ought Not to Pass” on LDs 1046 and 1066**.

Thank you for your time and for your continued leadership.

Sincerely,
Ruben Torres
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